

In a Bottle
By
Daniel Carlyon

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Daniel Carlyon

1442 W Bryn Mawr Ave. #2
Chicago, IL 60660

djcarlyon3@gmail.com

Cast of Characters

Linda: Outgoing. In love with Mark.
Mark: Indrawn. In love with Linda,
and also science.

Scene

A television interview, and the years before. (Note: '***' indicates a transition. This represents us moving back in time as Linda remembers her relationship with Mark. They should be done simply, without much flair, but we should be able to tell when we are in Linda's memory and when we are in Linda's interview.)

IN A BOTTLE

We see Linda in the middle of an interview. She is put-together and professional. She is reminiscing.

LINDA

Mark was always... in his own world.

Pause. She realizes what she said.

Sorry, can I start again?

She collects herself.

Mark and I met in the spring of our sophomore year. He was a physics major, so he certainly stood out when I first saw him in our upper-level English classes. He wasn't like the other non-majors, though--he really seemed to want to learn the language we used. He really tried to understand everything. It was fascinating. I mean, sometimes he was more interested in the material than we were. And he was brilliant, when he spoke, which... wasn't very often.

A college campus. A pleasant afternoon.

LINDA

Mark?

MARK

Um, hi.

LINDA

It's Linda. We're in Special Topics in Shakespeare together?

MARK

I know. You know *Love's Labors Lost* very well.

LINDA

(laughs)

So do you!

MARK

Thank you.

LINDA

I was just wondering--I didn't see you in class today, and I just wanted to know if you were OK, or needed the notes or something.

MARK

I'm fine. The notes would be good to have.

LINDA

(hands him notes)
Here. I made you a copy.

MARK

Thanks.

Pause.
Goodbye.

LINDA

...Bye.

LINDA

He didn't seem interested in getting to know me at all. Not in that first conversation. But then he ran into me again, outside the dining hall, and it was like he was a different person.

She smiles.
You know, I never got a straight answer from him, if it was a coincidence that he ran into me that second time. I guess maybe he didn't want to wait for a second chance, so he went ahead and made his own.

She stops herself short. Suddenly she is tense.
Oh, God, I... that's not what I meant. I mean, I'm not trying to imply... Please don't show any of this out of context.

Outside a dining hall; Linda has just eaten dinner. Mark sees her.

MARK

Linda.

LINDA

(startled)
Mark! Hi! How are you?

MARK

Do you want to know why I wasn't in class?

LINDA

I... Sure. Are you OK?

MARK

I'm fine. It was because of a blueberry.

LINDA

(starts to laugh)

A what?

MARK

Don't laugh.

LINDA

(stops herself)

I'm not. Why because of a blueberry?

MARK

I was walking to Rogers Hall, and I stepped on a blueberry. It squished under my shoe. And I picked it up, and I saw that it had collapsed. So I squished it more, between my fingers, and then between the balls of my hands, and then I stomped on it as hard as I could, but it still wasn't completely squished.

LINDA

It sounds like it was pretty squished to me.

MARK

No! Enough to make it collapse into itself. Enough to make it a black hole. That's all it needs, you know.

LINDA

A blueberry?

MARK

Pressure. Just... enough pressure. And if you can make a black hole...

He mimes something expanding out of nothing.

LINDA

Wow. That's... fascinating.

MARK

Yes.

Pause. He looks like he is about to say something.
Goodbye.

LINDA

...Bye.

She starts off.

MARK

Wait, Linda?

LINDA

Yeah?

MARK

Do you... want to go on a date this weekend?

LINDA

...Sure.

MARK

Great. Good. Great. Okay. Bye.

He leaves. Linda is at a loss for words.

LINDA

Bye, Mark.

LINDA

I wasn't really expecting much from the date at first. It was, and I'm a little ashamed to admit this, but it was very much a pity date. But something about him kept me interested. He, um...

She starts to tell a story from the date, then thinks better of it.

Whatever it was, I decided to give it a second chance. And then a third, and a fourth, and before I knew it we were dating. Even when the summer rolled around and most spring couples called it quits, we stuck together.

Linda's dorm room. The atmosphere is charged, giddy--young love blossoming.

MARK

Your turn.

LINDA

OK. This summer... I worked at an ice cream parlor across town, which meant I got to walk home through Forest Park every day.

MARK

(unsure of what to say)
That sounds like a nice park.

LINDA

Oh, it's gorgeous. My dad used to take me there all the time I was a kid. Some days I'd bring my My Little Ponies and we'd pretend he was a giant that stumbled into their glen. The ponies usually attacked him. Then they'd all fly away on dried leaves. Dad had to help me get each pony onto its leaf.

MARK

Didn't the leaves crumble with the ponies' weight?

LINDA

Well, you had to pretend. That was the whole point! The ponies couldn't really fly either. Didn't you ever play pretend with your parents?

MARK

My parents were astrophysicists. They were busy studying the universe.

LINDA

(laughing)
Wow, the whole universe?

MARK

It's 10:20.

LINDA

(confused)
...Okay.

MARK

Didn't your roommate say she was coming back at 10:30?

LINDA

I suppose she did...

MARK

I don't want her to be angry.

LINDA

She won't be angry. Mark, you are so concerned with other people. Loosen up!

MARK

I don't think I can.

LINDA

Maaaaark! Come here.

She pulls him to her. They cuddle.
I suppose it would be nice if we could get away from her for a little longer. Get away from everyone for a while...

MARK

It would.

LINDA

Just the two of us... In our own little universe! You think your dad could find one of those for us?

MARK

I don't think so. We'd have to make one.

LINDA

(playfully)
Well, then get on it, physics guy.

MARK

OK.

LINDA

(laughs)
Good. Now come here.

They kiss.

LINDA

That was... I guess that was the beginning of everything. I mean, black holes he was always interested in, but that stuff I said... well, maybe it's because of me. Maybe I was the catalyst.

Beat. Linda abruptly giggles.

Sorry, I'm just... Mark had this joke, about the particle that started the Schrödinger Cat experiment, how it was Schrödinger's Catalyst. It was his favorite joke. It... you know, I can't even remember it anymore. It went...

She looks away.

Oh God, what was it?

A pause. When she looks back, she is hastily wiping her eyes.

Sorry. Um. Sorry. ...What was the question?

Linda and Mark's home. Mark is holding a ring.

MARK

Do you like it?

LINDA

Mark...

MARK

If you don't, I can return it. The saleswoman assured me that I could exchange it for any other ring of equal or lesser value if you want to. Or if you don't want to get married.

LINDA

Mark, stop. I love it.

MARK

Good! Good. Because I actually lied about the saleswoman.

LINDA

She wouldn't let you return it? Honey--

MARK

She doesn't exist. I didn't buy this. I made it.

LINDA

You... made the ring?

MARK

The diamond. That part there.

LINDA

(laughing)

I know what a diamond is, Mark. What do you mean, you made it?

MARK

It's just pressure. I built a machine that can apply pressure at astronomical levels. And it made this diamond out of a pebble. But that's not all! Look!

He pulls out a small box and opens it. We don't see what's inside, but we hear a rushing sound that is both tiny and enormous. Linda reaches for it.

LINDA

Mark... what is that?

Mark stops her hand and closes the box.

MARK

Don't get too close. It's a black hole.